

Hunter Indoor Sports Centre (HISC) – Submission (SUB-77654972)

Object to the project

The proposed Development Application for a Hunter Indoor Sports Centre at 2 Monash Road and 24 Wallarah Road, New Lambton would remove a significant recreational green space area of over 3ha (reported as an area of 7.83ha in Environmental Impact Statement – Hunter Indoor Sports Centre, July 2024). This site of Wallarah and Blackley ovals currently provides valuable community green space. It is heavily used for recreation and as playing fields for football and cricket. Lambton High school, which has approximately 1200 students, uses these ovals every day for sport and during break times. The proposed DA would directly impact access of the community to open green spaces, displace the soccer and cricket teams to alternate fields outside the suburb and limit outdoor green spaces available to local school students.

Green space is precious. It is vital that this DA is not approved for this site but rather an alternate site is found. At the recent Newcastle City Council meeting, the Lord Mayor confirmed that the \$25 million grant from the State government has been allocated to a Hunter Indoor Sports Centre but is not locked into this site. Rather, the \$25 million can be put towards a development on a different site. The former Hamilton North gasworks site is close to the sporting/entertainment precinct at Broadmeadow and to public transport, has ample parking and its redevelopment would not take away green space. Alternatively, a new HISC could be incorporated into the current State Government owned land within the Broadmeadow precinct. It is vital that Newcastle CC reaffirms its commitment to preserving open green spaces that provide recreational opportunities accessible for all residents.

When green space is removed, it is never returned. Stage 1 of the HSIC DA indicates an equivalence of only 40% of green space would be retained. Further stages have not committed to any specific green space retention. Any discussion of a ‘trade-off’ of additional green space in the Broadmeadow precinct development to compensate for the lost green space of a proposed Wallarah and Blackley Ovals site development is similarly flawed. The Broadmeadow precinct/Hunter Park Sporting precinct development should meet its own requirements for green space and minimising urban heat island effects, in according with planning policies and controls.

The additional concerns regarding traffic and safety issues, the exacerbation of flooding risks and the shortfall in funding beyond stage 1 should highlight the need to look elsewhere for a suitable development site.

The proposed HISC development on Wallarah and Blackley Ovals does not aligned with the State, district and local environmental strategic plans and policies applying to the site. In fact, the proposed development is highly inconsistent, as outlined in the examples below.

Newcastle Environment Strategy 2023

The Newcastle Environment Strategy 2023 clearly prioritises Nature-Based Solutions as an integral part of the CSP. This Community Strategic Plan, towards 2040, aims to ‘Strengthen our natural environments ... to support healthy, biodiverse systems ... and maintain recreational amenity as well as ecological and community value’ including maximising urban greening. Any development of the New Lambton ovals completely contradicts these objectives.

Surely maintaining these green spaces will assist in achieving the NES strategic priorities and targets and show a commitment to protecting Newcastle’s green spaces for future generations.

Hunter Regional Plan 2041

Objective 3 – Create 15-minute neighbourhoods to support mixed, multi-modal, inclusive and vibrant local communities.

Objective 6 – Conserve heritage, landscapes, environmentally sensitive areas, waterways and drinking catchments.

Objective 7 – Reach net zero and increase resilience and sustainable infrastructure.

This planning proposal does not comply with Objective 3 as it reduces local access of the neighbourhoods, local schools and sporting groups to the open green space provided by Wallarah and Blackley Ovals (performance outcome 3). Similarly, such a development would significantly reduce green spaces to support the regeneration of and connection to the natural environment (performance outcome 7).

Green infrastructure for 15-minute neighbourhood assets (p38 HRP 2041) include

- tree-lined streets, including road verges
- regional parks, urban parks, open space reserves, formal gardens and community gardens
- river and creek corridors, cycleways and safe routes along road, rail or light rail corridors

- ovals, school and other institutional playing fields, and other major parks and golf courses

Currently, Wallarah and Blakley Ovals and surrounds provide these assets as well as contribute to reducing urban heat island effects, as identified as a priority in the Newcastle Development Control Plan 2023 - DCP 2023, Section B6 Urban heat. These existing green spaces create more natural, sustainable ecosystems, cooler spaces, improved water absorption and air movement, and as a result, improved community health and wellbeing.

Transforming over 3ha of turfing, woody vegetated and garden area to largely buildings and car parks does not conserve valuable green landscapes, contradicts Objective 6 and makes the achievement of net zero much more difficult (Objective 7). This area has also been identified as a significant flood zone. The Wallarah and Blakeley ovals are essential in providing vegetative cover, tree canopy cover along walkway/cycleway/transport corridors and permeable surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff and help mitigate flooding pressures, including from the Lambton Ker-rai Creek stormwater canal.

The existing shared pedestrian pathway/cycleway on the southern side of the ovals is heavily used by the community and as safe passage for school students each day. In this development proposal, sections of the southern pathway/cycleway would be re-routed onto the increasingly busy Turton Road.

Hunter Regional Plan 2036

Goal 3 – Thriving Communities

Direction 17: Create healthy built environments through good design

Direction 18: Enhance access to recreational facilities and connect open spaces

Direction 17 identifies the importance of integrated recreational walking and cycling networks in enhancing the quality of neighbourhoods and community participation in physical activity. Similarly, Direction 18 highlights the importance of accessible open space areas for community enjoyment and recreation opportunities.

The existing open green spaces of Wallarah and Blakeley Ovals provide accessible recreation areas for the local community, schools and sporting groups and will meet an increasing need as future housing developments occur in the nearby Broadmeadow precinct. It is vital that these areas are retained.

Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036

Key outcomes of the GNMP 2036 are to:

- Enhance environment, amenity and resilience for quality of life
- Improve connections to jobs, services and recreation.

The vision of this plan highlights the importance of showcasing Newcastle as a lifestyle city with green suburban communities. This encompasses ensuring access to open space and recreation networks will influence the quality of life of the growing metropolitan city (Outcome 2: Enhance environment, amenity and resilience for quality of life). The GNMP 2036 recognises the importance of green spaces. 'Residents value Greater Newcastle's diversity of natural landscapes and enjoy lifestyles based on a range of social, recreation and sporting opportunities.' (Strategy 10 Create better buildings and great places, p32 GNMP 2036) Currently, this value is being provided in part by Wallarah and Blakeley ovals, being heavily used by the community, local schools and sporting groups.

The proposed HSIC development would have a direct detrimental impact on the availability of accessible green spaces for the neighbourhoods, local schools and sporting groups including cricket and football codes. Enhancing community access to sporting, recreational, cultural and community services and facilities (Action 11.1, Strategy 11 Create more great public spaces where people come together, GNMP 2036) should support the continued use of popular existing facilities. A site for the proposed HSIC development should not be to the detriment of existing sporting facilities. Protecting these ovals from encroachment of development is also consistent with Newcastle City Council's commitment, as one of the Greater Newcastle councils, to 'improve access to open space, recreation areas and waterways so that 90% of houses are within a 10-minute walk of open space' (p 35, Action 12.1, Strategy 12 Enhance the Blue and Green Grid and the urban tree canopy, GNMP 2036).

Newcastle Local Strategic Planning Statement 2021

The Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) identified, through public consultation, that the Newcastle community highly valued accessible special places centred on our natural environment, public spaces and parks. Such places help develop a sense of community and opportunities for people to connect. Our Newcastle community was most concerned about the loss of trees and public green spaces. (p8 LSPS 2021) The importance of trees and public green spaces was again highlighted in the public exhibition. The 20-year land use planning vision, detailed in the LSPS 2021, prioritises:

- A green city with an urban environment which is greener with natural areas retained, protected and enhanced with more public park and street plantings.

- A liveable city where our community has accessible and walkable streets, parks and gathering spaces in each neighbourhood and local centre.

Planning Priority 4 (LSPS 2021) clearly states the benefits of green spaces and that, moving towards 2040, 'greenspace across the City of Newcastle is maintained and improved.' (p34 LSPS 2021) As detailed, this principle aligns with State and CN Priorities and is consistent with Newcastle 2030 strategies

- 2.2a Provide and advocate for protection and rehabilitation of natural areas
- 3.1a Provide quality parkland and recreation facilities that are diverse, accessible and responsive to changing needs
- 5.1a Ensure our suburbs are preserved, enhanced and promoted, while also creating opportunities for growth

Hunter Indoor Sports Centre Environmental Impact Statement SSD-65595459

Intended outcomes:

- To encourage participation in sports for Indigenous people, women and girls, people with a disability and people of culturally diverse backgrounds
- To facilitate improved health outcomes, social and community inclusion and opportunities to learn a variety of sports

Participation in and accessibility to recreational facilities and sports are currently provided by the Wallarah and Blackley Ovals. These freely accessible spaces are used daily by Lambton High school students and regularly by football and cricket teams. These green spaces are available to community members 24/7 and already provide the social and health benefits. The removal of these green spaces and replacement with the proposed HISC would have an immediate and direct detrimental impact on wide participation in sporting and recreational activities and, as a result, health outcomes and community inclusion. The proposed development:

- indicates only 40% green space replacement in Stage 1, with no commitment to allocated equivalent green space for further stages
- would not be available to all community members 24/7 as current ovals are
- removes over 3 hectares of green space adjoining existing shared pedestrian/cycleway paths that is easily accessible for the community and local schools to use
- removes well established trees that provide shade and habitats for native birds and endangered Greyheaded Flying Foxes as well as vegetated movement corridors for local and migratory species

The EIS p98 clearly acknowledges that:

The proposal will reduce the open space available for local sporting clubs and Lambton High School as well as informal access by the community to the open space.

It would make much more sense to retain this green space for local sporting clubs and develop a site such as the former Hamilton North Gasworks for the HISC. This would avoid the relocation of the existing sporting clubs, increase access for many more sporting groups and increase the area of green spaces for our community.

The token *External activation areas on the western side of the building including a half basketball court to engage with the public and adjoining open space. (p36 EIS)* does not provide adequate freely available and accessible recreation space for the public. To date, it is still uncertain whether this will be accessible 24/7 to the public or will be fully fenced and inaccessible.

The HISC DA indicates that the BANL would develop partnerships with Lambton High School and the wider community to facilitate patronage of the facility by school groups. This suggests that access to the facilities would be at significant cost to both local schools and the local community.

In summary, it is vital to retain the freely accessible, public, open green space provided by Wallarah and Blackley ovals. The proposed HSIC DA should not go ahead, but rather an alternate site such as the former Hamilton North gasworks be investigated.

Retention of this valuable green space:

- provides measurable improvements in physical and mental health and wellbeing of those in our community
- enhances long-term savings for the NSW healthcare system through increased participation in outdoor recreational activities
- improves the liveability of our local, growing community
- shows that Newcastle City Council recognises the vital importance of retaining public open spaces where it is most needed, surrounding areas identified for extensive housing development
- helps mitigate the impacts of a changing climate and the urban heat island effect in our community
- shows that Newcastle City Council values existing green spaces and recognises their responsibility in enhancing the public open space network, consistent with the Public Open Space Strategy for NSW 2022
- seeks to increase public, shared outdoor green spaces for future generations
- shows Newcastle City Council's authentic commitment to strategies including Newcastle Local Strategic Planning Statement 2021, Newcastle Environment

Strategy 2023, Hunter Regional Plan 2036, Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036 and Hunter Regional Plan 2041

- shows that Newcastle City Council has the vision to retain and revitalise the existing ovals in Lambton and allocate the development of the HISC to a disused site such as the former Hamilton North Gasworks, extending the areas of green spaces in our city